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ABSTRACT

Each hemisphere of the brain has several primary functions that are interesting to explore in terms of all areas of creative endeavor, particularly those involving both speech/language and imagery. Therefore in preparing students to interpret and share the artisitc expression of the poet, the writer, the storyteller, or the dramatist, the teacher should explore not only the symbolism but also the sensory experiences, the visual imagery, the spatial perceptions, and the fantasies that are ultimately manifested through the artist's language. Techniques and exercises that can stimulate such right hemisphere activities include spatial perception; visual imagery, including shape, form, direction, facial expressions and physical appearance; and the perception of nonlinguistic environmental sounds. First, it is important to create the right environment. Everyone should be made as comfortable and relaxed as possible. At this time simple suggestions can be made to clear the mind of any intrusive thoughts. Next, students are moved into more extended work in imagery such as the guided fantasy, or personalized, subjective explorations in which they are sidecoached through an adventure in a specific environment. During the debriefing, students are urged to talk about "what happened" and to share their metaphoric adventures. What follows next may be the actual work with the performance of the literature or additional work with right hemisphere functions. In this way, right hemisphere experiences can be translated into language or speech. (HOD)

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GUIDED IMAGERY AS A BI-MODAL APPROACH

TO

PREPARATION FOR PERFORMANCE

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Lincoln, Nebraska April 1983

CS 504 164

Tree House

A tree house, a free house
A secret you and me house
A high up in the leafy branches
Cozy as can be house.

A street house, a neat house
Be sure and wipe your feet house,
Is not my kind of house at all
Let's go live in a tree house.

Shel Silverstein
Where the Sidewalk Ends

Think of all of the things that we could do best in a tree house: cloud watch, people watch, relax, daydream, get in tune with nature and with ourselves, hear a poem or song in the mind's ear, paint a picture in the mind's eye...

On the other hand, both figuratively and literally, there are an equal number of important tasks that could be better done in the street house... write checks and pay bills, plan a schedule of our time to get things done in the best possible order, write down the poem we heard, pick out the tune on the piano and write the score, organize the materials and get the picture from the mind's eye onto canvas...

Within each of us, within every child, are both environments nestled side by side and connected by a very sturdy bridge composed of 200 million commissural fibers obviously intended for heavy traffic. We are describing, of course, the human brain whose two complementary hemispheres connected by the corpus callosum are facetiously likened to a 3-1/2 pound walnut exquisitely fitted within the human skull. Resident in each hemisphere are several primary functions and these are interesting to explore in terms of all areas of creative endeavor, but most particularly those which involve both speech/language and imagery.

Descriptors of the left hemisphere functions are: verbal, linguistic, propositional, sequential, linear, rational, logical, Euclidian. Descriptors of the right hemisphere functions include: visual/spatial, imagistic, holistic, synthetic, metaphoric, appositional and intuitive. However, the functions are not totally discrete and, as Ornstein reports, when the corpus callosum is intact, the brain appears to be able to cross-reference or combine some functions from each of the hemispheres.[1] Indeed, cooperation between the hemispheres can produce a synergistic mode of mentation which can present some exciting possibilities for work in oral interpretation and the theatre arts.

We begin with a piece of literature--poetry, prose, drama--a product of both hemispheres of the writer whose sensory perceptions, visual imagery, and imagination have been synthesized in the invention of the work which is then shared through the symbols of language. Rarely would such inventions begin with language though words and phrases may motivate the imagery; but surely the genesis of most valued works of art begin with the imagination--imagery, insights, intuition and fantasy. The imagination then seeks expression through some form of representation--melody, rhythm, paints, clay, movement, words. When such expression is artistically most successful, it appears to be a result of a symbiotic relationship advantageous to both the imagery and the symbolization, a product which Samples would attribute to the metaphoric mind.[2]

Therefore, in preparing our students to interpret and share the artistic expression of the poet, the writer, the storyteller or the dramatist should we not only diligently explore the symbolization but also the sensory experiences, the visual imagery, the spatial perceptions and the fantasies

which were ultimately manifested through the artist's language. Bring the functions of the right hemisphere into a symbiotic and synergistic relationship with the verbal/linguistic functions of the left hemisphere. Create a Fourth of July onrush of traffic, both directions, over the corpus callosum. The gates are opened for the performer, whether reader, storyteller, or actor, to do, as we have been gently reminded by Ruth Sawyer, "share not with the mind alone, but...with the heart and spirit."[3]

Techniques and exercises intended to stimulate such right hemisphere activities as spatial perception; visual imagery, including shape, form, direction, facial expressions and physical appearance; and the perception of nonlinguistic environmental sounds can provide invaluable experiences to bring the interpreter into the creative process. Not to evaluate the inventive process of the writer but to enable the interpreter to "re-create that achievement for his audience" by knowing "exactly what the author has done..." because the performer has also explored ideas, feelings, experiences and attitudes through the metaphoric mode.[4]

For the balance of this paper you are invited to spend some time in the 'tree house' considering some of those things which are best done in that environment which is at the same time both primitive and lofty, natural yet complex. Several strategies will come into play, but we shall devote most of our attention to the use of guided imagery as a technique for stimulating visual/spatial perceptions, invention, and synergic integration as preparation for interpretation and performance. The three steps to a successful application of these techniques will be investigated separately.

PREPARATION

Creating the right environment for a successful experience with guided imagery as a prelude to performance is critical. To the extent possible, it is desirable to begin with everyone as comfortable and relaxed as possible so that the left hemisphere is producing a high percentage of alpha waves. Soft lighting, perhaps some soft music in the background, and everyone in a comfortable position with eyes closed sets the stage. Take time with getting ready...it should not appear forced or hurried. The leader speaks in a soft voice intended only to facilitate and guide rather than direct. With the participants relaxed, each person breathing deeply in time with her/his own body rhythms, simple suggestions are made to continue to clear the mind of any intrusive thoughts. Focus on feeling relaxed, even euphoric. It is useful to suggest imagery associated with the environment of the literature to be interpreted or performed. For example, let's imagine that we will be working with poetry, stories, or a play in which water plays a significant role. During the relaxation experiences, the players may be invited to visualize in the mind's eye morning mist rising over a tranquil lake or the ocean dappled with sunlight as a soft breeze plays over the surface of the water. Each person is lying comfortably in a small boat, legs stretched out and arms gently resting along the gunnels, face turned to the sky where sea birds catch the breeze in long swoops and glides. The sounds, like the colors, are soft and muted. Make the experience as multi-sensory as possible without becoming too complicated and elaborate. A few strong, well-chosen suggestions are preferred to paragraphs of descriptive material. The point is to encourage each person's

individual and unique response to the stimuli. During this preliminary work, occasionally remind the participants to feel relaxed and in tune with the space, colors, shapes, sights and sounds suggested. Here is also a good time to practice seeing and hearing in the mind by suggesting, from time to time, small changes in the scene, e.g. if the original environment was one of dappled sunlight on the water and enveloping warmth, clouds may begin to roll across the face of the sun and the breeze pick up adding a bit of chill to the air, drops of rain may create a staccato in counterpoint to the gently rocking boat. Allow ample time for the participants to explore each new experience. During the preparation period, keep tensions minimal saving conflict and problems to be resolved for the entended fantasy. When the leader feels that a sufficient level of relaxation and imagery has been achieved by the players, it is time to move into more extended work in imagery such as the guided fantasy.

GUIDED FANTASY

Guided fantasies are personalized, subjective explorations in which the participants are sidecoached through an adventure in a specific environment. The use of first or second person and present tense is preferred. The theme for the fantasy may be based quite directly upon the piece of literature under investigation or deal only with certain aspects or qualities of the literature. For example, to continue with the theme presented in the preparation just discussed, a guided fantasy based on John Masefield's "Sea Fever" could involve each person as the navigator of a sailing ship alone on the open sea, pitted against the forces of wind and wave, a solitary figure at the helm working valiantly to bring the ship into safe port.

The focus would be not only on the sensory involvement with the environment but also with the feelings of loneliness, physical challenge, and the sense of triumph and elation as so fragile a being struggles against the magnitude of nature. Or the guided fantasy might serve to deal with similar emotions but in a different context--perhaps as future explorers of the galaxies, each player is making probes into deep space in tiny, individual ships grappling with an environment in which flashing lights on a computer replace the "star to steer her by".
(Additional suggestions for work with guided imagery and fantasies appear at the end of the paper.)

The guided fantasy need not be long but should be well planned toward the leader's purposes. It is especially useful to include points where each participant has an opportunity to make an individual decision about a problem at hand. The narrative should have a sense of wholeness with a beginning, middle, climax and ending which provides transition back into the here and now of the classroom.

DEBRIEFING

Equally important to adequate preparation is the debriefing with the participants following the guided imagery work. Here is the time and place to cross the bridge from spatial perceptions, visual and auditory imagery, multi-sensory explorations over to the world of language and speech. Even reticent, intrepid explorers generally are excited to talk about 'what happened' and to share those unique aspects encouraged by the opportunities to make individual decisions at times within the fantasy. Here is also the place to begin to relate our metaphoric adventure to those of the writer or writers whose work we are exploring as we, too, seek just the right words

to re-create our experiences for others.

What follows next may be the actual work with the performance of the literature or additional work with right hemisphere functions. Equally rewarding can be the interpretation of the imagery through mime and movement, or playing out the guided fantasy as a parallel play sidecoached pantomime. Age and stage of the students may be an important consideration at this point. However, we wish, ultimately, to translate the right hemisphere experiences into language, into speech, for this is, after all, the modality of both the writer and the performer of literature.

For years we have wisely counselled our students to 'go to the source' in order to better understand the literature, however, more often than not we have directed them to neat, "street house" type places. This is, of course, reasonable and typical of our Western culture but let us not overlook the possibilities of using other modes of discovering insights as well. After all, have any of us ever met a child (young or "old") who did not long to spend some time in a "tree house"?

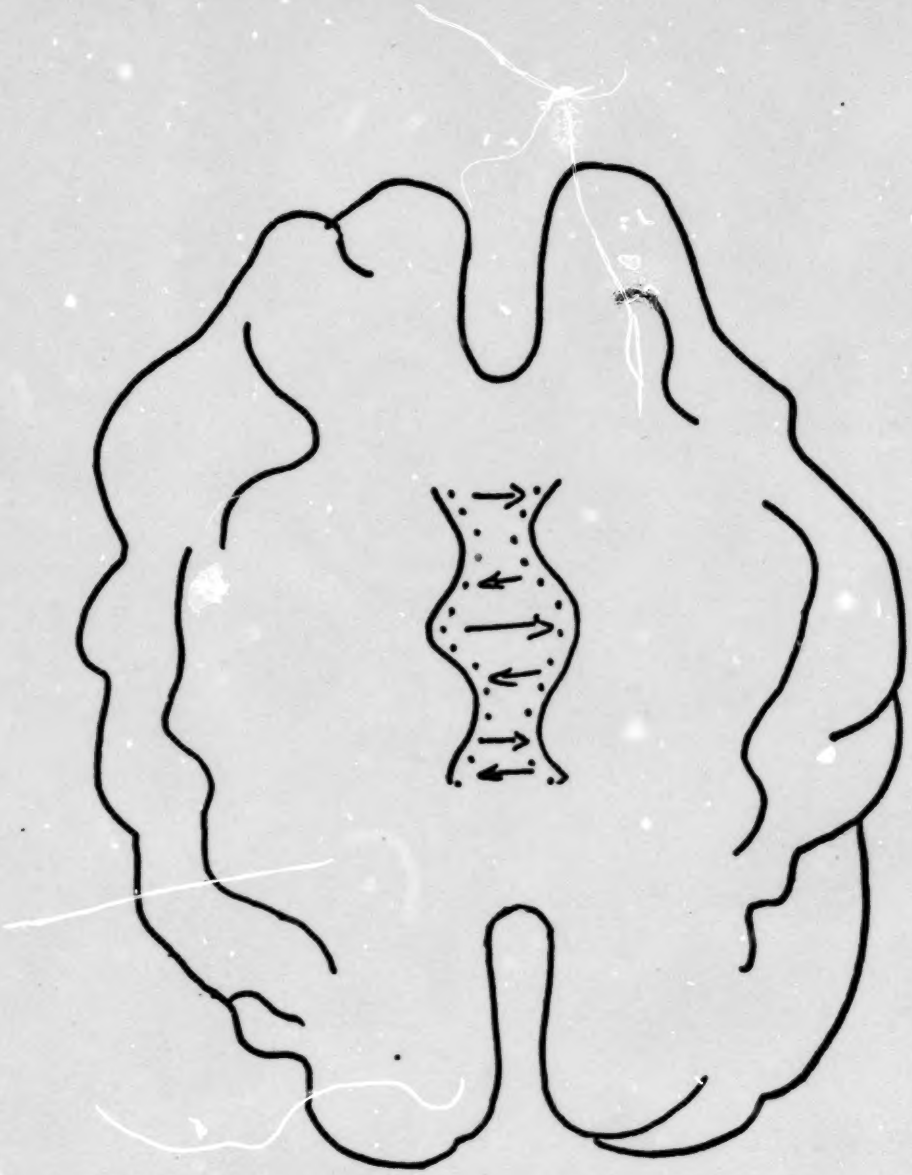
ENDNOTES

1. Robert Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman Company, 1972).

2. Bob Samples, The Metaphoric Mind (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981).

3. Ruth Sawyer, The Way of the Storyteller (New York: Viking Press, 1942).

4. Charlotte Lee, Oral Interpretation, 4th. ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1971).



Left Hemisphere	Corpus Callosum	Right Hemisphere
...verbal	...hemispheric connectors	...visual
...linear		...spatial
...numerical		...intuitive
...rational		...imaginative
...logical		...sensory
...Euclidian		...imagery
		...metaphoric
		...perceptual

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PRELIMINARY WORK IN GUIDED IMAGERY AS PREPARATION FOR PERFORMANCE

RELAXATION:

Use theatre games which involve tension/relaxation. The 'content' of the games may be chosen (or adjusted) to fit the theme of literature and the age and interests of the students.

Breathing exercises to induce relaxation.

Manipulation of the environment to encourage relaxation.

SHORT EXERCISES TO PRACTICE VISUAL IMAGING

"See" a kaleidescope of shapes and colors in the mind. On cue, change the pattern. Repeat several times until players can easily create and change scenes at will. Change the random pattern into a scene. Put yourself into the scene. Add another person and interact with him/her. Watch the other leave; watch yourself leave the scene.

Visualize a favorite room...at different times of the day...different seasons of the year.

Visualize several natural environments...at different times of the day... different times of the year.

Listen to a short poem. Let the mind form pictures suggested by the language.

Visualize several settings, e.g. the main street of a Old West town, inside a medieval castle, inside a cave, the street corner of a big city, a bus station or air terminal.

Listen to different sounds with the eyes closed; use the imagination to wonder 'what else' it could be. "See" and "hear" the offerings of the imagination.

Work from poetry...see the post's imagery in the mind's eye.

Work from plays or stories...visualize the setting...visualize the characters...put them in the scenes. Visualize several consecutive scenes as a series of slides or a TV storyboard.

Listen to music in different moods...visualize colors, movement, scenes.

Each person tapes his/her own reading of a short piece and then, with eyes closed, visualizes the scenes. Exchange tapes and visualize working with different reader's tapes.

Each participant visualizes her/himself performing with artistry and self-confidence.

WHERE AND WHEN APPROPRIATE, THE LEADER GUIDES THE VISUALIZING WITH A SOFT "VOICE-OVER" ALLOWING GENEROUS OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETATION.

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Film: The Enchanted Loom. Produced by Thames Productions